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"THE REPORT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON GRAMMATICAL NOMENCLATURE"

A REJOINDER TO MISS CIPRIANI

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In the December issue of the *School Review*, Miss Cipriani, favorably known to scholars by her studies in French syntax, pleads vehemently in favor of teaching French from the point of view of French. The *Report of the Joint Committee on Grammatical Nomenclature* elicits her strong disapproval because—in her opinion—it commits the time-old mistake of looking at grammar through the outworn lens of Latin; whereas in this age of “declaration of rights” it seems to her timely “to face, even in the French classroom, the facts of the French language fairly and squarely as, to the best of our knowledge, they have been established by modern scholarship.” “For centuries,” she says, “the teaching of French grammar has been shackled and handicapped by grammatical traditions and considerations alien to French itself.”

Unfortunately this plea, admirable as it is in intention, is based on a total misconception of the Committee’s clearly defined object, which was to deal with the nomenclature of grammar as applied to the entire group of languages now taught in our schools—not with *the* grammar of any *particular* language—and on a failure to note that the point of departure of the *Report* is not Latin but English. The Preface of the *Report* (p. vii) reads: “For us English-speaking people, the whole foundation of grammatical study is laid in the study of English in the grammar schools. All our subsequent work, in whatever language, is based on this study. The Committee has kept this fact constantly in mind.” And in a subsequent paragraph: “In starting constantly from English, the Committee has done no wrong to the study of any other language. In a few instances, fuller distinctions are needed in other languages to account for actual differences of forms . . . and these dis-

tinctions have to be provided for in their proper places." This program the published *Report* carries out with meticulous care; in special paragraphs devoted to the purpose it treats the claims of the separate languages, never forgetting that economy of terminology is as necessary in language as in science (p. vi); and while we may criticize the *Report* on this point or that, any unbiased person is compelled to admit that it is as fair to French as to any other one of the languages considered.

The fact is that our grammatical concepts are necessarily bound up with Latin. Time was when Latin and grammar were interchangeable terms. Happily that time is past. Modern science has broken down more than one of the strongholds of the past: among them the idea that grammar is itself a science, the eternal laws of which can be deduced from the human understanding. To mention but one instance, and that French, such a book as Brunot's *l'Enseignement de la langue française* shows what a large amount of clearing-up has been going on in the field of grammatical theory within the past twenty years, and to what an extent the task of the teacher of elementary language has been lightened and made attractive. At the same time, especially in the case of the modern foreign language, grammar will have to be taught, much as it has been in the past, as an organized system of rules and precepts—arbitrary in many cases, scientific where it is feasible, but in every case *practical* and adapted to the age and the aptitudes of the pupil. And for this purpose, Latin is still the best available model, especially for the teacher of the Romance tongues.

With these prefatory remarks, we may now pass on to Miss Cipriani's specific criticisms of the *Report*. With one exception, they deal with the problems of French: the terms "conjunctive" and "disjunctive" as applied to the French personal pronouns, the "past descriptive" as a substitution for the "imperfect," the types of the conditional sentence in English and French, and the theory of the French subjunctive. In all these cases Miss Cipriani would have the teacher make "*truthful*, not merely *expedient*, statements concerning these facts." As an ideal this is certainly desirable: "il faut enseigner des choses vraies" (Brunot), provided always the instruction remains practical. The trouble is that such "truthful" instruction (and it is quite evident that Miss Cipriani means

"historical") seldom is, particularly in the lower grades. We cannot teach the student the "truth" about *me* and *moi*, *me le* and *le lui*, *au Mexique* and *en France*, etc., without entering into a mass of historical details for which here in America he has neither the necessary preparation nor the particular aptitude. What we can do is to give him a *working* rule corresponding in particular to the practical difficulties with which he is confronted, and trust to a later, more advanced course to enlighten him on the reason for the phenomena he has learned. Even in the teaching of French to native children, M. Brunot has a word of caution for those who would employ the historical method. He says: "Il serait très utile à l'instituteur d'avoir quelques notions de grammaire historique pour lui. Quant à l'usage, très prudent, qu'il en devrait faire, ce serait, suivant moi, celui-ci: il en profiterait pour donner partout à ses règles un caractère moins raide, moins impératif, et, dans quelques occasions, il utiliserait directement l'histoire pour éclaircir et simplifier sa leçon." The Committee, it seems to me, has constantly kept this principle in mind, and its nomenclature is framed with reference to the *actual* phenomena of the languages considered, as they present themselves from the practical aspect of the elementary classroom.

In a paragraph on p. 37 the *Report* explains the choice of "conjunctive" and "disjunctive" in place of "stressed" and "unstressed," "tonic," and "atonic," which Miss Cipriani would prefer. Four reasons are given, which may be elaborated as follows:

1) "Conjunctive" implies "yoked with" the verb—in position and in syntactical relation; "disjunctive" implies the reverse. This is the *obvious* fact: *je le lui donne*; *donnez-le-lui*; *llamándome*, *sentémonos*, *será difícil procurármelos*; *mandatecelo*, *voglio darglielo*.

2) "Stressed" and "unstressed," etc., fail to indicate the essential differences in position and function. In *donnez-le*,¹ the *le* is "stressed" in function but not in form, yet it is "conjunctive"; in *lui qui donne*, the *lui* is "stressed" in function and in form, and it is "disjunctive"; in *il lui donne*, the *lui* is "stressed" in form but not in function, yet it is "conjunctive." In each case, the latter term and not the former describes the present situation "truthfully" and "practically."

3) "Conjunctive" and "disjunctive" have the advantage of not being used elsewhere in grammatical nomenclature.

¹ Of course, *donnez-moi*, *assieds-toi*, have to be explained as "exceptions." But *donnez-m'en* and *va-t'en* are again regular.

4) "The disjunctive" pronoun in a prepositional phrase is often unemphatic. What is meant is that its *function* is unemphatic. Certainly *pensez à elle* is not necessarily more emphatic than *dites-lui*. It so happens that one cannot say: *pensez-lui*. Thus, again it is the position that determines the form. Cf. Diez, *Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen*³, III [*Conjunctives Personalpronomen*], p. 52.

Now Miss Cipriani questions whether the terms mentioned give the requisite "exact characterization" of the phenomena of of differentiation between personal pronouns. I was not a member of the Committee, and I do not know why the Committee chose "the most exact characterization" (Miss Cipriani, p. 681, omits the word "most") as determining their choice of a term. Personally, I should prefer saying "that term is chosen which gives the dominant or prevailing characteristic of a phenomenon," because the statement "most exact" is misleading and in the majority of cases it is impossible to find an "exact characterization." However that may be, her specific objections are based on two examples. They are: *Il faudrait peut-être d'abord que lui songeât à moi*, and *Mes frères et mon cousin m'ont secouru, eux m'ont relevé, et lui m'a pansé*. "In both examples," she says, "the supposedly 'disjunctive' *lui* and *eux* are just as much 'joined to the verb' as the more ordinary *il* and *ils* could ever be when placed in the same position, the real difference being obviously one of *stress*." This is certainly true if we limit ourselves to these examples, in which, as she admits, the more ordinary *il* and *ils* could replace, as far as grammar is concerned, the less ordinary *lui* and *eux*. But, as every French teacher knows, in every case except the third person¹ the "conjunctive" form of the pronoun should be used in such sentences in addition to the "disjunctive," so that if we substituted in the first sentence a *vous* for the *lui* the dependent clause would read *que, vous, vous songiez* (better than *songeassiez*) *à moi*. Thus, it follows that the rule as given by Fraser and Squair (p. 272): "with *lui* so used,² and [sometimes] also with *eux*, the conjunctive subject may be omitted," is the proper, most truthful rule to teach.

But Miss Cipriani also contends that since the Committee recommends that a term used of "a given phenomenon should be employed for every phenomenon identical in force," the terms

¹ Cf., however, *il ne voulut pas lui*.

² "In appositions, often emphatic."

"stressed" and "unstressed" have the further advantage that they could be extended to the possessives, demonstratives, interrogatives, and the verb—in which last case they are already "*un fait acquis* for the better taught French classes." True as the last contention may be, and it is certainly helpful for the student to grasp that *tiens* is the product of stress whereas in *tenons* the *e* is unstressed (cf. *acquiens* and *acquérons*), still this fact in itself is sufficient reason for rejecting the principle of stress in naming the types of personal pronouns: (1) the principle does not "characterize," (2) the analogy between *tiens-tenons* and *moi-me* or *lui-le* cannot be made clear without elaborate explanation. As for the possessives, the characterizing factor here is function: the possessive pronoun has one form and the corresponding adjective another. So, too, when it comes to the interrogative, it is hard to see in what respect *à quoi pense-t-il?* is today more emphatic than *que dit-il?* the real difference again being "disjunctive" and "conjunctive." There remains the demonstrative. Here Miss Cipriani's contention has more weight: of the one form of the demonstrative (the *ecce ille* form) the "stressed" type has, in general, survived, of the other (the *ecce iste* form) the "unstressed."¹ Nevertheless, here again function is the outstanding feature—the demonstratives are pronouns or adjectives—and when it comes to the forms *ceci*, *cela*; *celui-ci*, *celui-là*, etc., the term "contrasting" demonstrative seems to me advisable. On this subject the *Report* does not pronounce itself, but *celui sur la table* ("the one on the table") and *celui-là, sur la table* ("that one, on the table") vary rather as to precision than as to stress; historically, *celui* being itself a "stressed" form.

In the matter of tense-names, Miss Cipriani levels her criticism at what she calls "the shackle" of the "past descriptive." She thinks the new name does not fit in with the "felicitous choice of names" made for the other tenses; and since the *Report* recommends "past future" (conditional) and "past perfect" (pluperfect), she suggests "past present" (imperfect).

The consistency she aims at in this instance, however, is more apparent than real. The first is a future tense (*il viendrait*) considered from a past point of view, expressed in the ending; the

ce O.F. *ço* < *ecce hoc* is a separate case.

second is a past tense which was perfect (complete) in a past time, just as the "present perfect" is complete in a present time; the third is a past tense considered from the point of view of one present, as Armstrong, *Syntax of the French Verb*, p. 30, says: "the speaker takes the standpoint of a contemporary speaker." Since the first two names thus express the dominant idea by the second word of the term, it would follow that the "imperfect" should be called the "present past." But what of the student? He needs a name which he can readily grasp and which is not limited to a phenomenon occurring in one language. Since *écrivais* (*scribebam*) and *écrivis* (*scripsi*) are both past tenses and are liable to be confused, that term is preferable which by designating their respective function at the same time distinguishes between them. As the *Report* points out (p. 38), the idea of duration is not essential to the first tense, but the idea of situation is—"its office is always descriptive." This office it fulfils not only in Romance but also in Latin and Greek. Cf. Armstrong, *Syntax of the French Verb*, 2d. ed., p. 32: "In consequence of its character, the imperfect is especially suited to descriptions and to portrayals of customs, and may quite properly be called the *descriptive past*." The "past absolute" does not have this function, and its own character of emphasizing the end or the beginning of a past action is quite foreign to the "past descriptive." Graphically, the one represents a line in the past, the other a point. Inasmuch as situation is contrasted, on the one hand, with occurrence or conclusion, on the other, hard as it is to find a perfect nomenclature, the terms chosen by the Committee are at least adequate. "Past descriptive" or "descriptive past" is self-explanatory; "past present" or "present past" is not. As a *secondary* term the latter may be used, but it always requires a great deal of explanation on the part of the teacher to make advanced students grasp that there is such a thing as a present-within-the-past, and with elementary students bold is the instructor who would even attempt it. For these reasons, I think, Miss Cipriani's criticism of "past descriptive" is not well taken.

In taking up the vexed question of conditional sentences (cf. *Report*, p. 27), Miss Cipriani first draws attention to the fact that in French it is the context and not the *form* of the sentence which allows us to decide whether a condition is present, future, or

both simultaneously. This is obviously true since *si* meaning "if" cannot be followed by a future tense: *s'il le fait, il aura raison*, may signify either "if he is doing this, he will be in the right" or "if he shall do this (if he does this), he will be in the right," or it may have both meanings. The *Report* is silent on this score; but the classification it gives occasions no difficulty for the teacher of French who has instructed his class on the proper use of *si*. So that inherently there is no valid reason for making a new classification, such as Miss Cipriani thereupon proposes, based on the content rather than the form of the sentence. Besides, as the *Report* says: the idea of time "seems easier for the student to build upon, since the distinctions *past*, *present*, *future* are familiar to him through constant use elsewhere." As to her further stricture on the Committee's classification, namely, that the type "if he should be doing this, he would be doing right" despite its rareness should have been taken into account by the *Report*—which gives only "if he were doing this, he would be in the right," the point is decidedly well taken. The former is "ideal," "neutral," "less vivid," and the latter is "contrary to fact"; both are present time. But instead of substituting, as Miss Cipriani suggests, the term *more vivid* for the term *neutral*, is it not preferable to retain the latter term, because of its contrast with *contrary to fact*, and then subdivide *neutral* into *more vivid* and *less vivid* for both the present and the past conditions? In this way, the principle of the *Report's* classification would be kept, with a distinct gain in clearness.

Finally, in her last paragraph, which deals with the French subjunctive, Miss Cipriani holds a brief for defining the mood-idea of the subjunctive for elementary pupils—an evident omission on the part of the *Report*. But the difficulty is, and doubtless the Committee was aware of this, to find a statement on which the authorities will agree. Miss Cipriani herself admits that while "one of the chief functions of the subjunctive in modern French is to indicate that the assertion is not made as a fact, but as something conceived in the mind of the speaker (Armstrong), to express a thought, an idea," nevertheless she "feels" strongly that "subjunctives of feeling and opinion are, both in Italian and French, used deliberately with the full consciousness of expressing a fact, not a thought."

"And how," she continues, "could it be otherwise with the characteristic Romance 'sense of reality'?"

Is she not confusing here what is *real* with what is an accepted *fact*? There are nations, and the French are at the head of them, to whom ideas seem more *real* than facts. The observation has been frequently made, and I need not insist. But all this has nothing to do with the function of the subjunctive. The fact is that the subjunctive does express both facts and ideas as concepts; the subjunctive *assumes* that the predicate is an idea, "it represents the predicate *as an idea* (Gildersleeve)." *Je regrette qu'il soit malade* means "the idea or thought of his illness makes me regret"; and so it is with most French subjunctives, I believe. When, however, it is not so, then the modern language has carried over the construction from the past—that is, the present reason for the subjunctive is "historical." On this account the Committee may not have wished to generalize as to the actual nature of the mood; and, on the whole, their caution seems wise. In support of the foregoing view, I may cite two writers neither of whom can be accused of not approaching the subjunctive from the Romance point of view: Professor Brunot, who says (*op. cit.*, p. 48): "Toutes-fois dans 'je ne doute pas qu'il ne vienne' pourquoi encore le subjonctif, puisqu'il y a maintenant assurance? C'est que, comme souvent, *la forme l'emporte sur le sens*, et cela est commun dans toutes les langues"; and M. Foulet (*Modern Language Notes*, XXV [1910], 227)¹: "Pourquoi la langue dans l'ensemble met le subjonctif après *il faut que*, c'est une autre question: il y en a peut-être des raisons logiques, il y en a plus probablement des raisons historiques. Mais ou je me trompe fort, ou l'individu (et je le prends cultivé et raisonnant sur sa langue) ne met ici le subjonctif que par *la force d'une habitude invincible*."

The *Report of the Joint Committee on Grammatical Nomenclature* is doubtless a compromise between various conflicting views. It would be nothing short of a miracle if *all* its recommendations should prove acceptable. But let us at least be fair and make our criticisms in the same broad spirit in which the *Report* was conceived and executed.

¹ Cf. also the sound remarks on this subject in Professor Hale's "A Century of Metaphysical Syntax," *Publications of Congress of Arts and Science*, St. Louis, 1904, Vol. III.